

River Road Warrant Article Proposals

River Road washed out just south of North Thetford Road on April 30/May 1 2011. The Selectboard determined, on advice from their engineers and supported by NH Department of Environmental Services and the US Army Corps of Engineers, that the road was not safe to re-open, even as a single lane road. The Board has subsequently worked with Holden engineers to prepare a satisfactory resolution. In so doing, they took note of the fact that this is an historic road and that closing it would threaten the historic fabric of the town. They were also concerned that other historic roads in town were threatened and that some citizens would use the closure of River Road to press for the closure of other roads. Accordingly, the Board determined that any solution needed to preserve the road and riverbank; it also needed to be a permanent fix, not a short-term solution which punted the problem for a future Selectboard to fix in five or ten years time.

The solution that the engineers have developed and that the Board is proposing is to relocate the road approximately 30ft. farther inland and to develop a 3:1 sloped bank with rip-rap on the lower section, easing up to 8" "envirogrid" mesh filled with soil from about 4 ft above river level for another 4 ft and then planting for the 8ft above that up to the roadway level. This is a well-proven solution developed by the US Army Corps of Engineers. Ultimately the bank, although well armored, should grow back in to a well-vegetated, natural environment. The expectation with this design is that the bank should withstand a 100-year storm and that there should be no significant damage in more minor storms.

To undertake relocating the road we need to take property from the two abutters: Carola Lea and Marselis Parsons. Both abutters have been exceedingly helpful in facilitating the process. However, Carola Lea's land is in a conservation easement held by Upper Valley Land Trust. This means, that even with every party being keen on making this work, the town needs to take possession of her land by Eminent Domain. That determination by the NH Attorney General, last October, is what stopped the town from starting work in the fall. However, the process is moving forward and the Board is confident that, if Warrant Article 7 passes, they would be able to sign the necessary agreements immediately after Town Meeting.

As shown in the Article, the maximum appropriation for this project is \$590,700. This money would not come as a major tax burden, but would be covered from the Unassigned Fund Balance, which is what is left over at the end of the year after all specific expenses have been allowed for. There would be a slight effect, because we would have to borrow money earlier in the year. (The general fund varies from having \$6,000,000 in early/mid December, dropping down to zero around July and from then until November, we are borrowing against our anticipated taxes.) It is projected that the impact would be in the region of \$8,000 this year – approximately \$10 on a \$400,000 assessed house. There is a policy in place for the maximum and minimum recommended levels for the Unassigned Fund Balance – between 7% and 15% of our gross annual budget. Appropriating this sum from the Fund Balance would bring its level down close to our minimum level; we would expect to see the level restored to nearer the mid-level over the next few years.

The costs shown are those developed by the Road Agent, in conjunction with in-town contractors. Effectively every contractor with a six-wheel truck or excavator, together with the Highway Department, would be involved in the construction. The contractors and the Road Agent are confident that they would be able to further reduce some of these costs. The Highway Department would be responsible for the road construction with assistance from the contractors, while there would be a lead contractor on the riverbank work with assistance from other contractors and the Highway Department.

The Board has noted criticism of their engineer by a few individuals. In the event that Article 7 does not pass, the Board has proposed Article 8 as an alternative approach which would appoint a new engineer and re-visit the whole problem. The sum appropriated in this article is the maximum that the Board considers acceptable to expend; it is possible that the actual figure would be significantly less. The Board believes that Article 7 will pass and that it will be unnecessary to even consider Article 8.

January 31, 2012